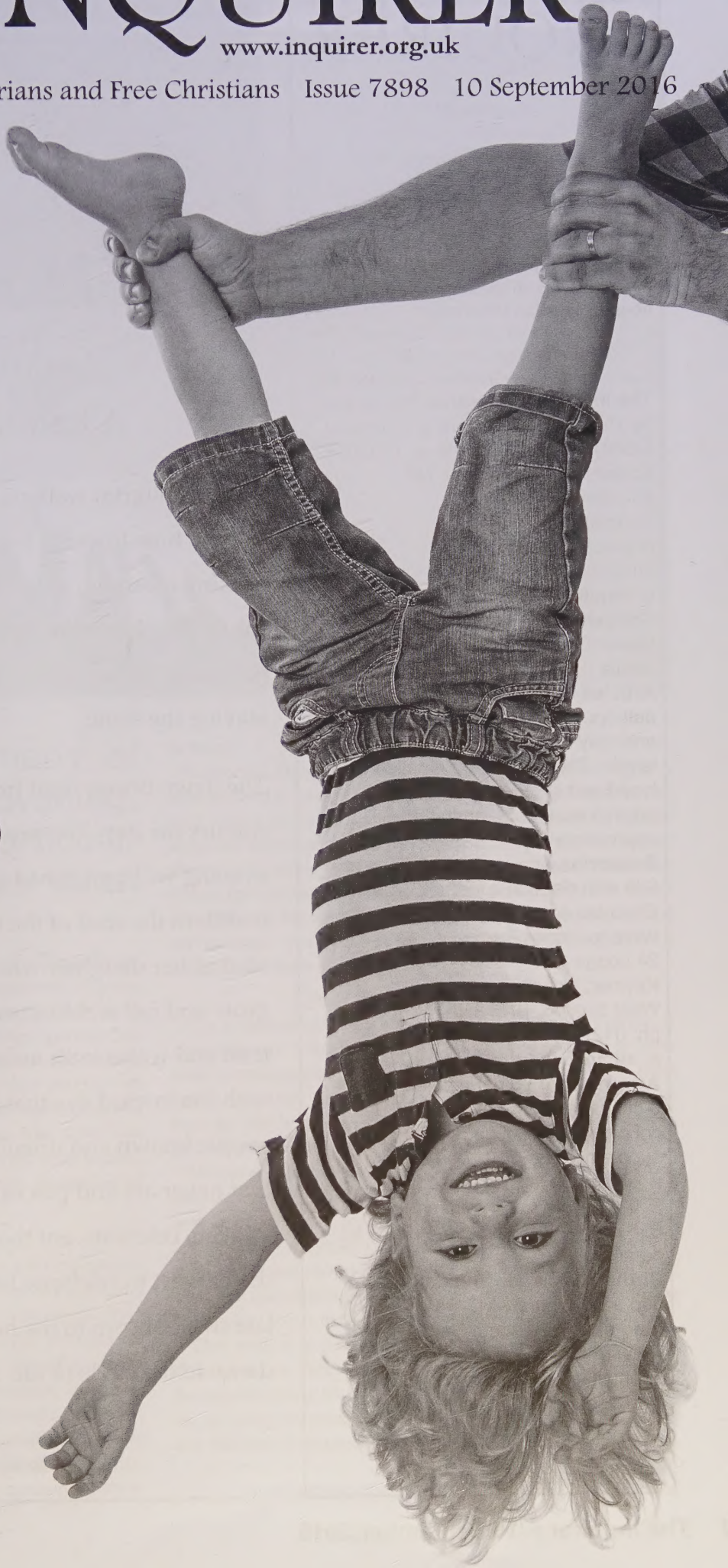


# Who do you trust?



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# The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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**"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the  
General Assembly of the Unitarian and  
Free Christian Churches 2001*

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## Inquiring Words

### A Lammas Meditation

See that pilgrim walking slow. A measured tread. On a path of time towards a shrine. Seeking peace, seeking love, seeking meaning, seeking life. Changing from yesterday into today, becoming tomorrow. Each pace a change, decaying and growing all in one yet becoming new and staying the same.

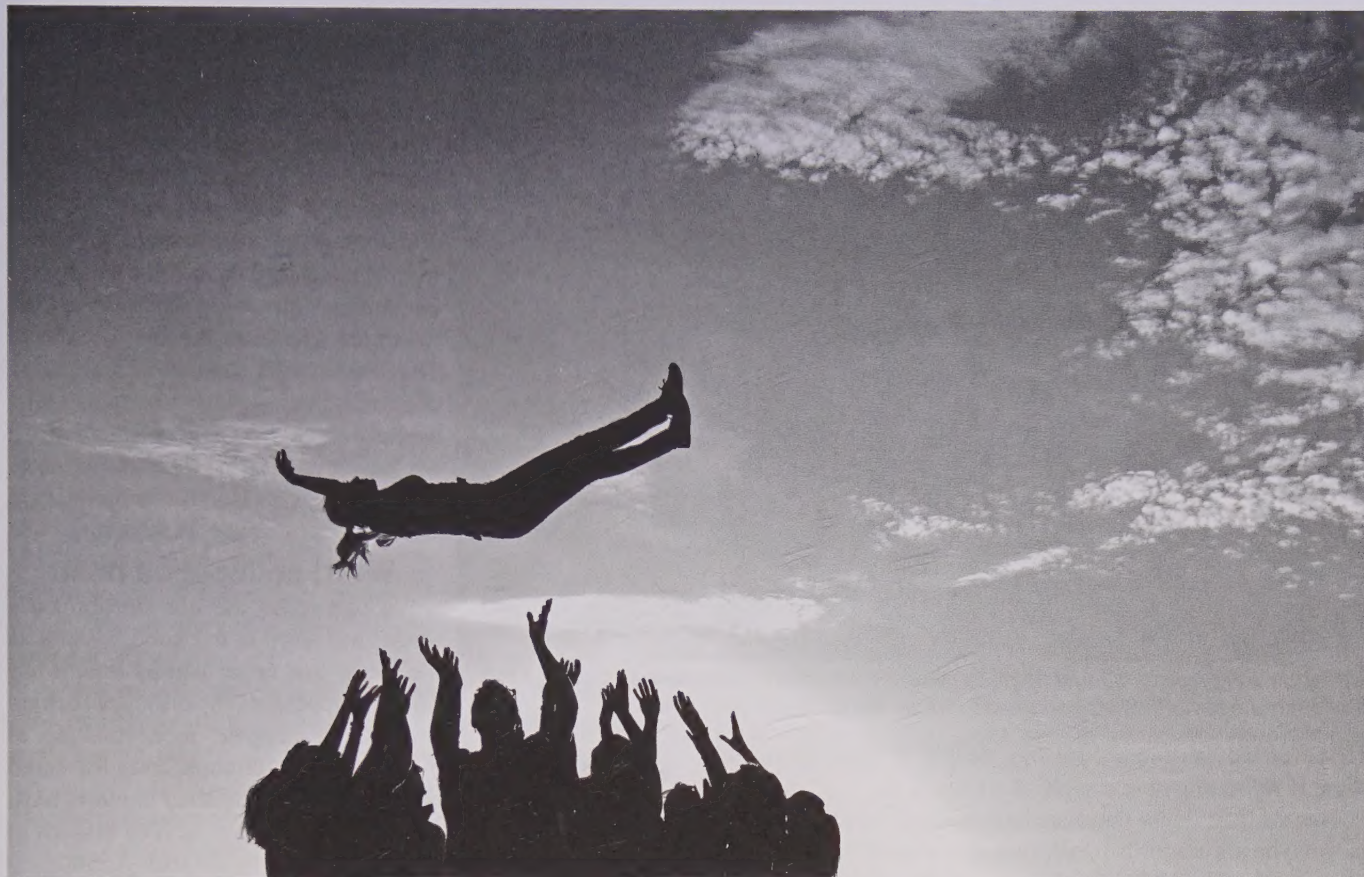
The dawn brings light from the dark shadows and the sun colours the day. The promise of the day is evening and evening will bring shadows and a new dawn. Nothing is still. In the seed of the mother sowing the corn is the seed of her daughter who will reap it. The barleycorn will grow and fall and live and fall again. The pilgrim sees it all and walks with measured tread. Sees also a world with the inward eye that is filled with places seen and people known and dreams of what might be. Sees places that never are and places and people that never will be, Pilgrim, celebrate, eat the bread from the first cut grain of the harvest to celebrate life and death. Cut and carry the last sheaf of corn to the hearth and plant in the spring and dance to the circle of life. And walk on.

– Tony McNeile

*Photo by FreeImages.com/Andreas Krappweis*

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# Trustworthiness is a religious trait



Shutterstock photo by Nicoleta Raftu

Trust, essential in many of our relationships, is waning. Congregations in particular must rebuild it, says **Alan Ruston**

What is the key concern that enters into everyday life, politics, finance and much else that was hardly considered 70 years ago? It's a theme that seems to have been at the back of so much of modern life since the 1940s which today we most feel in need of? It is of course – *trust*. A short word, but one that has been endlessly examined over recent years. Most people now feel that trust between people and also inside institutions has declined and doesn't seem to be what it once was. Trust was a key concept in the Old Testament – don't trust other people, trust only in the Lord – perhaps not the most acceptable of formulas for everyday living today.

## A reliance on integrity

An interesting book on the subject, written with the general reader in mind, is by Katherine Hawley, Professor of Philosophy at St Andrews University. It's in the Oxford University Press 'A Very Short introduction' series. She admits it's not easy to define as trust is at the centre of a whole web of concepts: reliability, predictability, expectation, cooperation, goodwill, and – the dark side – distrust, insincerity, conspiracy, betrayal, and incompetence. The dictionary says something similar – 'trust is a confident reliance on or belief in the integrity, veracity, justice, friendship, power, protection, etc. of a person

or thing.'

Katherine Hawley is clearly a youngish woman with a husband and a young family and she gives examples from her own life – a group of women with twins on the web try to help someone with triplets with big problems, in the upshot she was shown to be telling a lie and everyone felt deflated. Katherine points out that trust is a relationship among people, it raises expectations, but in many circumstances it's based on rational self-interest – you trust people when you think it's in their own interests for them to help you.

## Trust is breaking down

It's a mutuality which she argues is best seen in terms of commitment – when we trust people we rely on them to meet their commitments. It's flexible as someone may meet their commitments to you because it's in their interests to do so, or because they're good-natured and caring or because meeting commitments is a good strategy.

However there's an unquantifiable feeling that trust between people in society generally is breaking down, the commitment is disappearing with an increasing lack of sincerity. Although not generally expressed as such, trust and trustworthiness is a religious and moral concept. If we didn't have a level of trust and commitment to each other, congregations could not continue to exist; they would break down and disappear.

That said, it is a compliment when we trust someone and distrust is, in fact, an insult – not just an inconvenience. Sometimes being trusted is a burden if, for example, we take on too many responsibilities which we cannot meet. Then we can become distrusted even if we've the best of intentions.

*(Continued on next page)*

# Breakdown of trust affects all walks



*Unitarian congregations must begin to rebuild trust among members and across the Unitarian movement. Unitarian Image Library file photo*

However we can't avoid trusting people or even distrusting them if we're to live in society as we know it.

There's little doubt that trust has changed in recent decades and maybe it's in a form of evolution into something else. Onora O'Neill, the 2002 BBC Reith Lecturer argued that a growing culture of suspicion has generated demands for accountability nearly everywhere so undermining trust and professional responsibility, whilst consuming time and resources taken from elsewhere. (Transcripts and audio files of the lectures are here: [www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/)) It's argued for example that employers who monitor their employees' work too closely may even reduce their work rate, as employees feel less trusted and less inclined to show commitment. So distrust can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. People who are rarely trusted cannot demonstrate their trustworthiness and do not respond readily when trust is offered to them.

## Trust creates 'social capital'

If trust is reciprocated widely in society then there are positive advantages in terms of what is called 'social capital', it's called more technically 'generalised reciprocity' – this means we're willing to do favours for other people, in the expectation that somehow or other, indirectly this will be returned and all will reap rewards. For example if you help a stranger in the street with directions it's not expected that person specifically will help you in return. However there is the expectation that others will help you when needed. Living in a society rich in such small favours is good for us all. Our help is given on trust but unfortunately there appears to be evidence that this feeling of reciprocity is breaking down.

It's too easy to list those areas where trust is in retreat. For example a young person sitting in a crowded underground train doesn't now automatically get up for an older infirm person to sit down as once they did. Thank goodness it still happens a lot but it's far from automatic.

On a wider front, there has been a steady breakdown in traditional communities such as neighbourhoods, churches of course and at workplaces. At the same time there's been

an increase in the level of distrust as measured by the wariness that people have for their fellows due to the fear of criminal acts, and the massive increase in litigation as a means of settling disputes. We so easily now go to law. The state and the courts have sought to define individual rights, which in turn have undermined the ability of communities to set the standards for their members. Thus we have the contradictory situation of a society living off accumulated social capital which has helped create trust, while at the same time showing extremes of distrust and restrictive individualism which tends to isolate its members.

## Word no longer a bond

We can recall the old stockbroker's claim 'my word is my bond.' While as a claim it was never wholly true, it has now disappeared in disbelief behind the rise in rampant moneymaking at

all costs. Banks have lost millions through complex fraud so that trust is no longer possible and detailed controls have become essential. The bitter argument over women bishops in the Church of England was put down by the then-Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams in his closing speech to the General Synod in 2012 to a long-term lack of trust. The previous Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sachs, after 22 years in the post, reflected on BBC Radio 4 in August 2013 that religious faith underpins trust – which is essential in society. When trust breaks down institutions break down.

## Unitarians cannot ignore the issue

We must not think that our own Unitarian movement is exempt from the problem. The external consultant brought in by the General Assembly in 2001 to advise on setting up of what is its present governance stated in his report that our large number of committees and other failures to act together came out of a lack of trust among Unitarians. I was not alone in seeing what he meant.

Can anything be done about it? Changed attitudes are needed everywhere if things are to improve. The churches' *raison d'être* is to work towards creating a caring society based on spiritual values. But we're lamentably far off bringing this about – whatever our theology or the lack of it. We need to discuss what has happened to 'trust' generally and not ignore what is a key issue for us all.

We can't go back to the past and ask for a sense of trust back. The genie won't go back into the bottle. Where do we go from here? Churches, whatever their beliefs, have to put their own house in order first, and seek a greater sense of trust between each other locally and then nationally, so that we can be an example to wider society. If our beliefs about the nature of humanity and the spirit are to mean anything it's difficult to see there's any other path to follow.

*Alan Ruston is a Unitarian historian and a member of the Watford Fellowship.*

# Create ritual -- take it to the streets

I subscribe to a magazine called 'Positive News' which started life as a newspaper produced in Clun, Shropshire, the county in which I live. It contains, as you might expect, only news items which are positive, encouraging, hope-filled.

The latest issue has an article on ritual. I skirted over the subject of ritual last time I wrote for *The Inquirer* (2 July) but it is clear that many congregations do enjoy simple rituals and it may be worthwhile your contemplating whether you might like to add more, not necessarily every week, of course. I have always loved the Flower Communion Service and am a bit surprised that almost every congregation doesn't choose to hold one every year in the summer.

In the article there is the suggestion that the organised ritual does not work as well as the spontaneous which I can't accept. There is something comforting in a familiar ritual. And rituals can be used to mark particular events such as lighting the chalice for the start of the service (I wish you'd remember to blow it out at the end).

The writer of the article quotes Charles Eisenstein who writes that rituals are 'actions infused with sacredness'. He goes on: 'Rituals can shift our understanding about the world in which we live and help us act upon that understanding.' Professor Harvey Whitehouse heads up the Ritual Community and Conflict project; he writes of ritual being 'social glue' and suggests that many social problems could be solved by it. This sounds somewhat excessive but he quotes as examples people coming together to fund the building of monuments such as cathedrals and 'immense acts of charity such as Live Aid concerts'.

Now there was a response to the racism and xenophobia following the EU referendum in UNI-News to which I responded by sending an email to Unitarian General Assembly Chief Officer Derek McAuley:

*Yes, a very fine message, typically Unitarian, full of fine words and no action. What I really want is a call to all congregations to go out on the pavement after service on Sunday and sing:*

*If you love the Jews and Muslims, clap your hands.*

*If you love the Sikhs and Hindus, clap your hands.*

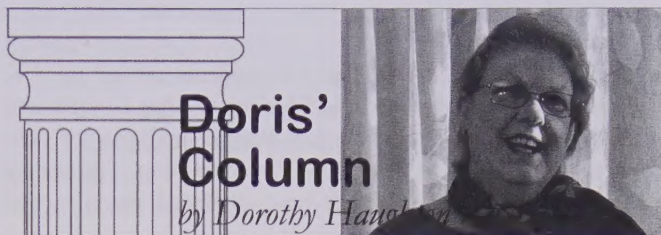
*If you love the Rastafarians*

*And even Unitarians,*

*If you love all of the Christians, clap your hands.*



Photo by Freelmages.com/Diane Miller



Which was sort of a joke but I now wonder if, in fact, I really do want to see congregations walk out onto the street, to create an instant ritual which might involve other people. Following the terror attack in Nice on Bastille Day, probably every congregation marked it in some way or another. But did any congregation feel the need to do something, to walk outside, to offer others the chance to join in with their prayers, light candles on the pavement, circle the candles with the flowers from the communion table?

I don't think you should hold a meeting about this. I think you should open your mind to the possibility, at some point in the future, of taking some form of action. So that if Mrs B at the end of the service picks up her hymnbook and says: 'I'm going outside to sing for the dead in *wherever*,' you will pick up your hymnbook and follow her.

I did look to see if I could find the article about ritual online but, sadly, not. I did find some other interesting bits and pieces, however, which you might like to follow up, which I have quoted below.

I leave you with a final quote from Eisenstein: 'Perhaps one day, a fully healed humanity will no longer distinguish something called a ritual, because all actions will be sacred. Until then, just as prayers can remind us of the sacredness of all speech and holy sites can remind us of the sacredness of all the earth, rituals serve to remind us of the sacred, world-creating power of all we do.' I'm not sure about the first sentence but I commend for your further consideration the second.

\*\*\*

## Good news websites:

Positive News: [www.positive.news](http://www.positive.news)

Good News Network: [www.goodnewsnetwork.org/news/world/](http://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/news/world/)

## Articles:

'Robert Heinberg wrote, in *Celebrate the Solstice*, 'The recovery of the ancient seasonal festivals is more than a symbolic gesture. It can be a meaningful way of reminding ourselves of the natural order of things.' Consider that you are standing on a madly spinning ball orbiting a fiery sphere circling a giant hole; the rhythms of nature and cycles of life are still there, waiting for the believers to fill them with meaning again.' (See the article here: <http://bit.ly/2bPvSsqj>)

See *Huffington Post* article, 'The Life-Changing Power of Positive Ritual at: <http://huff.to/2bylyn1>

P.S. A quick scan through *Inquirers* gives me the Cherry Blossom Service from Bury and the Table Service from SimpleGifts. Ministry Student Claire MacDonald, I notice, is offering to share her service. If you come up with interesting ideas you could do the same, couldn't you?

*Dorothy Haughton is a Unitarian worship leader in the Midlands.*

# Worship Studies course is updated

By Sue Woolley

In the past 10 years, more than 150 students around the UK have successfully completed the Worship Studies Course, and many have gone on to become Lay People In Charge of their congregations, or to Ministry/Lay Pastor training. The course was recently reorganised, with new advanced modules and tutors.

Considerable informal education and training of lay people takes place at congregational and District level. Our courses are intended to build on that and to provide nationally recognised qualifications (under the auspices of the Local Leadership Strategy Group).

For many years, the Joined-Up Education Panel, and its successor, the Worship Studies Course Group, has offered two modular training courses for lay people, in three steps. Our core values are to enable Unitarians to become better informed about Unitarian thought and history, and to help equip worship leaders in our congregations with the skills and background knowledge they might need.

The Worship Studies Course prepares students for conducting worship and lay preaching. It can be a useful preliminary for Lay Pastor or Ministry training. The Unitarian Studies Course gives students increased personal knowledge and understanding of the Unitarian & Free Christian movement.

The courses are organised in incremental steps. The Worship Studies Course Foundation Step is delivered by face-to-face training in Districts, and the Intermediate and Advanced Steps

are delivered by a combination of distance learning, daylong and residential elements. Part of the residential element is provided at the Unitarian Association for Lay Ministry's Annual Conference at Great Hucklow.

Students are expected to maintain a portfolio of their work, and a record of any additional relevant courses attended throughout the steps, for example, Hucklow Summer School, Unitarian Experience Week, the UALM conference, and other relevant conferences, courses or meetings. Such a portfolio will be particularly useful to WSC students applying for Lay Pastor or Ministerial training.

The Foundation Step is an introductory and prerequisite course in the conduct of worship and lay preaching. It prepares students to conduct worship for their own, or neighbouring congregations and fellowships. It is provided by Districts, or nationally for groups of students unable to access a District course.

Content:

- 1 What is worship?
- 2 Speech and Communication.
- 3 Elements of the service
  - a. readings
  - b. prayers/meditation/silence
  - c. hymns/music
  - d. sermon/address
  - e. stories/children
- 4 Practicalities and Precautions.
- 5 Sources and Resources.

Assessment is by regular attendance throughout the course, which is run over three or four Saturdays each year, and by the preparation and delivery of two services, which are assessed by the District course leader or other appropriate person, e.g. a minister or recognised lay leader / preacher / pastor, who should provide feedback. On completion, each student receives a Foundation Step Certificate.

For many lay worship leaders, the Foundation Step course is all they want and need, as it gives them the basic skills of putting together and delivering a good Unitarian worship service. But for those interested in going further, we offer two further steps: Intermediate and Advanced, both of which are provided nationally, mainly by distance learning, although attendance of the UALM conference and other relevant courses is encouraged. There is a course tutor (or more than one) for each of the modules. Each tutor has been approved and recognised by the Local Leadership Strategy Group.

To complete the Intermediate Step, students need to prepare one complete service for each of the four modules, with appropriate readings, prayers, opening and closing sections, hymns, and address. Two of the four services are assessed in the same way as the Foundation Step services.

The four Intermediate Step modules are:

- 1 Unitarian theology/thought.
- 2 Unitarian history-local/broader.
- 3 Biblical studies.
- 4 Earth-Centred Spirituality.

For WSC students this step extends their knowledge giving them more material to use for

(Continued on next page)



Rob Chapman, David Taylor, Sue Woolley, Andrew Rosser, Sue Elias, Len Elias, Debra Burberry, Roman Loxley-Doyle at the final session of the Midland Unitarian Association Foundation Step course, held at Kingswood in June. Photo by Ant Howe.

# Training continues to be popular

*(Continued from previous page)*

service content. For USC students this is their first Step, and they are expected to submit four essays, one for each module. It is expected that students will complete this step within twelve months, but we recognise that life happens, and are always open to requests for time extensions.

The Advanced Step comprises further and deeper study of the four Intermediate Step modules, and introduces four new modules, which were launched at the General Assembly Meetings. The Advanced Step modules are:

- 1 Unitarian theology/thought. (Compulsory)
- 2 Unitarian history-local/broader. (Compulsory)
- 3 Biblical studies.
- 4 Earth-Centred Spirituality.
- 5 Intergenerational Worship
- 6 Meditation & Contemplative Practices
- 7 Women and Religion in a Unitarian Context
- 8 World Religion within a Unitarian Context

For WSC students the step is suitable for those wishing to conduct worship regularly. It would be a useful preliminary for Lay Pastor or Ministerial training. For USC students the step further develops their knowledge and understanding of Unitarianism. Each successful student is awarded a Certificate of Achievement for each module. On completion of the whole course each successful student receives an Advanced Certificate and WSC students are entered on the General Assembly Roll of Lay Preachers and Lay Worship Leaders, and may be presented

with their Lay Preacher certificate by the President at the General Assembly meetings.

Although the amount of work may seem daunting for the Intermediate and Advanced Steps, don't be deterred – it is fascinating, and will give you a real insight into our denomination. I completed the Advanced Step in 2007, and the skills and knowledge I gained by doing it have stood me in good stead ever since. We currently have over 30 students enrolled on the Intermediate and Advanced Steps, so watch this space!

*The Rev Sue Woolley is the Worship Studies Course administrator.*

## Worship Studies Course begins soon

The York Unitarian Union is sponsoring a Worship Studies course, open to anyone who would like to do the foundation step. It begins on 8 October and sessions will also take place on 26 November, 4 February and 18 March. Sessions will run from 10.30am to 4pm. The Revs Margaret Kirk and Andrew Hill, retired Unitarian ministers, are the tutors.

They will lead sessions on speech and communication, catering for children, practical aspects of worship and will also offer resources for leading worship. The cost is £40. If you are interested in participating, contact Margaret Kirk on 01845 574542 or email: [kirkmargaret9@gmail.com](mailto:kirkmargaret9@gmail.com)

## Thinking of training for the Unitarian ministry or lay pastorate?

Applications for training beginning in autumn 2017 should be received by Monday 3 October 2016.

Shortlisted applicants will be called for interviews at Oxford on 5-6 January 2017.

For further information please contact:

Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General Assembly, Essex Hall,  
1-6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY

Phone: 020 7240 2384

Email: [mhennis@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:mhennis@unitarian.org.uk)

To discuss applying, please contact:

Derek McAuley, Chief Officer

Phone: 020 7240 2384

Email: [dmcauley@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:dmcauley@unitarian.org.uk)

# Fragments of Time

A young shepherd, leading his sheep,  
climbed the mountain to see a bush  
burning perpetually bright,  
heard in his heart the voice of God  
'Moses, you are chosen to lead  
my people to their Promised Land.'

Lightning flashed in the searing heat  
and choking dust on the long road  
from Jerusalem to Damascus  
where Saul became Paul and met  
with his God in a thin place  
between earth and eternity.

Blake in his mind's eye saw a world  
complete in a speck of warm sand  
and Heaven in a cool primrose,  
a microcosm of Creation  
neither a dream nor a nonsense  
but a gift from almighty God.

Some seventy odd years ago  
on the wings of an unseen bird  
a blind man flew up in the sky  
to sing with the stars and dance  
again in the streets of heaven,  
there to touch the face of his God.

A child on a hillside opened  
a window into Paradise  
where the sun shines eternally,  
but she was afraid that soon she  
must die and never find again  
that fragment of time out of time.

But the fragment is eternal,  
and bleak despair slowly departs  
as she comes to understand that  
in the mystery of his presence  
the soul will find eternal joy  
in the glory and love of God.

Amen So may it be

– Naomi Linnell

Inspired, in part, by an *Inquirer* cover story (30  
July) on 'Thin Places'.

Photo by Hrvoje Hudoletnjak  
via [freeimages.com](http://freeimages.com)



# May you find yourself comfy in your skin

The 'Talking Heads' once sang: 'You may find yourself in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife. And you may ask yourself, well how did I get here?'

The song was 'Once in a lifetime.'

And, how did I get here? Is a question I've been asking myself a lot recently as I've been experiencing a few once-in-a-lifetime moments.

Other questions: 'What have I done to deserve this?' And, 'Do I really belong here?'

I recently won 'Slimming World Man of the Year 2016', something I had to keep under my hat for a couple of weeks. It has been quite a ride, especially once the news came out. As part of winning the competition I spent a night in a luxury suite at the Ritz. I took my mum along and she loved it. On arrival there was a knock on the door. I answered it and there before me stood two men in uniform who walked in and introduced themselves as our butlers. Whatever we required, they would provide.

How did I get here? Do I belong here? Well, I did win. It was an amazing, if somewhat surreal, couple of days. And, I worked. I spent one afternoon trying on outfits with a stylist and a whole host of women. It was fun. I got into it and chose something I could wear for the 'Press Call' the next day. That night we ate at Savini at Criterion, Piccadilly Circus – a place I doubt I will ever eat in again. The next day came the 'Press Call', and then home to prepare for worship the following day. The next day the news spread and continued over the next week. No doubt in the coming months more will come out and, hopefully, some good will come of it. So far there has been a very positive response.

So, yes, a truly once-in-a-lifetime experience. It was wonderful to find myself in such places. And the truth is, I did deserve it. And you know what? I didn't feel like a fish out of water. I had earned it. I belonged there. I rarely feel that I don't belong these days. I belong anywhere because I have learnt to be at home within my own skin, within myself. I know who I am and I am at ease with who I am, imperfections and all. I can be myself anywhere, and in the company of anyone, because I no longer have to strive to fit in, to be a part of someone or someplace else, to seek the approval of others.

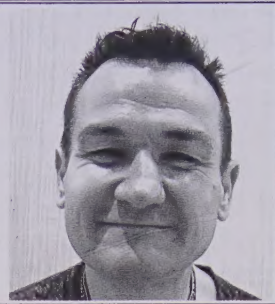
To belong, you need to be yourself. While, paradoxically, in order to be yourself you must first feel that you belong. When you feel that you belong you no longer need to fit in, because you are at ease with yourself.

Belonging is an innate desire to be a part of something larger than ourselves. This is a primal yearning, deep within the soul of us, and we often try to belong by seeking approval. This doesn't satisfy the yearning. Because we lose our identity and feel even more lost and lonely. True belonging only happens when we present our true, authentic, imperfect selves to the world, warts and all – and beauty spots too. Unless we are at home within ourselves we will never feel that we belong anywhere.

The problem of trying to fit in stems from a sense of being different, something I've experienced at times. This can be a real barrier. Sometimes barriers are put up by those who would exclude certain types of people. We have seen horrific examples throughout human history of people excluded for racial, political, religious, gender and sexual-identity reasons.

## From nothing to Everything

by  
Danny Crosby



Barriers still exist. Thankfully, many have come down. But far too many remain.

It can be difficult to join a group where you feel you are different from others. I experienced it myself when I began my Slimming World journey. Such groups are seen as the domain of women, only 3% of members are men in the UK. That is still nearly 50,000 men, but it is a minority. Being concerned about your weight and joining such groups is not considered a manly activity. So getting through the door and beginning the journey can be doubly daunting for men. I experienced this when I first joined. I remember looking around the room, seeing just women, and feeling self-conscious. This would have been an easy excuse to run.

But, thank God, I didn't. So, in the next 12 months I will encourage men to live healthier, happier lives. There are more overweight men in this country than women – probably because we feel it's unmanly to face up to the problem.

Most people find it difficult to join in, to belong to something, when they feel different to those already present. It's the same with any group or community, including churches and chapels. It's hard to walk into somewhere you've never been. It took me some time to pluck up the courage and explore a religious community many years ago.

We Unitarians say all are welcome. We encourage people to, 'come as you are, regardless of who you are, where ever you've been and where ever you are going. You are welcome exactly as you are in this moment'. Still, people are reluctant to walk through the door into our places of worship. And, when they do, they can find it hard to belong, even amongst we who offer religious freedom. The reasons are varied.

How we resolve it is not easy. The key is to be as open and welcoming as we can be. The key is to cultivate a true sense of belonging, beginning within ourselves. For if we belong, we will not need to try so hard to fit in. Hopefully, the stranger will feel like the neighbour. The key is to cultivate the pleasure of belonging. The key is to bless one another with our presence so others feel they belong.

A sense of belonging is a deeply precious thing. Belonging helps us become who we are meant to be. Belonging allows us to find ourselves in a beautiful place and feel we are home. Belonging enables us to be ourselves, in whatever company we find ourselves. Belonging enables us to make every moment a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Belonging allows us to become good neighbours and to the bless the whole world with our welcome.

May you find a place where you belong...

*The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Altrincham and Urmston.*

# Edinburgh Unitarians on the fringe

By Jane Aaronson

With the advent of August, our church premises became venue 125 in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, as it has done for many years. St Mark's is a city-centre church in a world heritage area. With its listed building status and excellent acoustics, it became the first Edinburgh church to provide space for Festival Fringe performances.

Edinburgh has many cultural activities on offer throughout the year, including a Science Festival; a Jazz Festival; and a Film Festival. However, in August, Edinburgh takes on an enhanced quality as a major Festival City. A wonderful experience not only for the inhabitants of Edinburgh, but also for its many visitors.

For three weeks we became the home of artSpace@StMarks. This year we hosted 85 Fringe performances. One of the shows performed was a collaboration between the Edinburgh Book Festival and the Festival Fringe. Nobel Laureate, Alice Munro's book, *The View from Castle Rock* was adapted for the stage by playwright Linda McLean and directed by Marilyn Imrie. The Edinburgh Book Festival advertised it as a 'centrepiece of the 2016 Book Festival'. The *Guardian* and *Times* newspapers gave it a four star review!

We were delighted that our 19<sup>th</sup> century church provided the backdrop for this play. The exciting production was presented by *Stella Quines*, award-winning theatre company. 'The deprivations and sorrows encountered by Munro's migrant family are sadly familiar, 200 years on,' wrote Marilyn Imrie, Director. Those of us who were lucky enough to see this dramatic production, which sold out very quickly, could not fail to be astounded by the transformation of our church



Simon Donaldson and Lewis Howden perform in 'Castle Rock' at St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh. Photo by Alan McCredie

sanctuary (complete with a sea mist) into a sailing ship which formed the evocative setting, as the remarkable story of the refugees unfolded.

St Mark's enjoys excellent acoustics which makes us popular as a music venue for outside organisations, throughout the year.

During August music is a highlight at artSpace@StMarks. One of the musical experiences we enjoyed this year was a series of performances of the complete Beethoven sonatas for violin & piano, performed over four concerts, by Lawrence Dunn and Gilmour Macleod. However no Fringe season would be complete at St Mark's, as we nestle in the shadow of the castle, without our usual two performances of Scottish Bagpiping: music of the great Highland bagpipes with the Royal Scottish Pipers' Society and friends.

Miraculously our church was able to re-manifest during this hectic three-week period, as a place of worship on Sundays, and also a mid-week place of peace for our Mindfulness@Lunchtime on Tuesdays. We were

grateful to our Fringe manager, our front of house manager and the many St Mark's volunteers who looked after the box office and front of house duties.

It has been a busy summer, but one of mixed emotions as at the end of July, we said our fond farewells to our well-loved minister, the Rev Maud Robinson. We wished her well, and then began our search for a new minister.

We look forward with anticipation to the 2017 Festival and to welcoming visitors to artSpace@StMarks. We also look forward to the time when we welcome a new permanent minister to St Mark's.

Jane Aaronson is a member of St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh.

## New workshop looks at anger and wholeness



After a successful 'Harnessing Anger' workshop in Brighton, John Harley and Susie Courtault are facilitating this day retreat again – this time in Richmond, Surrey, easily accessible from London. It is planned for 10.30am to 5pm on Saturday, 24 September, at Richmond and Putney Unitarian Church.

Explore your anger creatively and mindfully in a supportive,

playful space. It is a way to unlock our potential on a journey to wholeness.

A previous participant described the day as an, 'amazing workshop. I gained a better understanding of anger and how it affects me. I learned new tools in a fun, safe environment.'

Both leaders are drama-therapists and use a variety of different creative techniques to enable participants to identify and learn about angry feelings and process them healthily. Participants will learn about the clearing technique and have the opportunity to use art, improvisation and ritual to access their anger and wholeness in transformative, life-affirming ways.

For more information and a booking form go to [www.beherecreate.co.uk](http://www.beherecreate.co.uk) or speak with John at 07985 900935 or Susie at 07597 662840

# John Roberts treated all with integrity

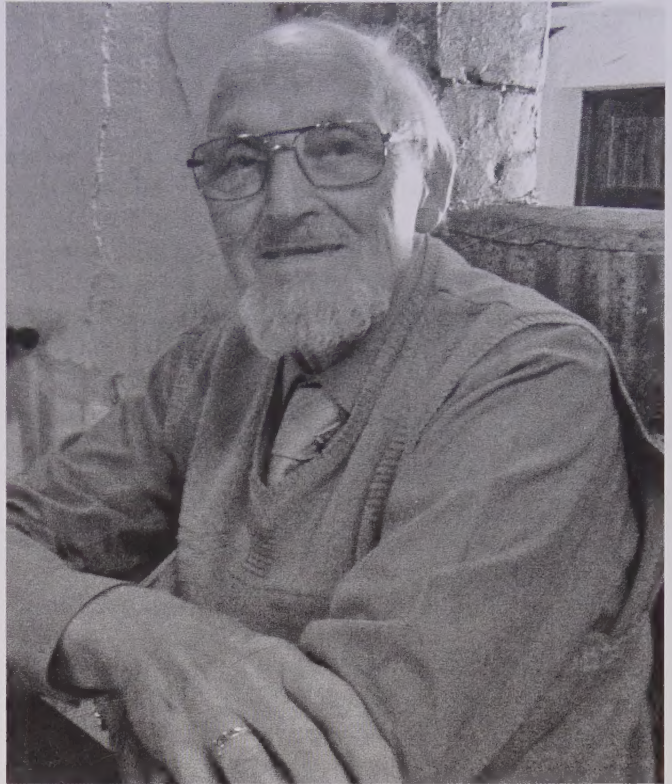
John Roberts was born in Bury in 1933. His parents' generation were the last to work in the mills, but John was a child of the Northern mill towns – through and through. The British values that were cultivated in him there stayed with him throughout his life. If something was broken, you fixed it. If times were hard, you stuck together. If someone needed something, you did the right thing by them, if you could. As well as always having a joke at the ready, John also possessed that quirky ingenuity, the love of life through a thousand hobbies, which many a Northern lad shared with him. He appreciated his life very much, and he tried to make the world a little bit better, whether by a little 'elbow grease' or by a kindly word.

John met his wife, the Rev Daphne Roberts, long before either of them joined the Unitarian ministry. They first met at 18-plus club events, and a few years later when John came back from National Service, they happened to work in the same office building. They began courting (John first asked her to join him in a tennis match.) and were wed in 1954. John was a devoted family man, to his son Gawain, and later to his daughter-in-law Ruth, granddaughter Jenny and great-granddaughter Abi.

During his time of national service, John served in the Royal Signals for two years, going to Germany and being promoted to Lance Corporal. He retained a lifelong interest and would later serve as an Honorary Padre of the local branch of the Royal Signals, Southport Branch for 30 years. He was much respected and admired by the Signals, who provided a guard of honour at his funeral. Particularly noted was his wit. John would often include a joke in his prayers. He later paid a return visit to Germany with Daphne, and made some good friends there; he spoke German fairly well. He retained a love of radios and all mechanical things, including a pioneering interest in computers, throughout his life.

John had worked in a number of jobs before the ministry: clerk, youth hostel warden along with Daphne, ambulance man, camera operator and engraver. He discovered Unitarianism, found that the beliefs were very much in line with how he viewed the world, and soon became an active member of Bury Bank Street Chapel. It wasn't long before others saw in John the makings of a good Minister, and he was asked if he had considered studying for the ministry. John had, in fact, and soon enrolled at Unitarian College Manchester. His student pastorate was at Rotherham, The Church of Our Father.

John served multiple congregations throughout his career. From 1969 to 1975, he served as Minister of Oldham Unitarian Chapel and Rochdale Unitarian Church. Then in 1975 he went on to serve Bolton Unity Church and Horwich Unitarian Free



*Photo provided by Ruth Roberts*

Church. Finally, he and Daphne moved to Liverpool in 1978, from where John served Southport and St Helens Unitarian Churches.

John was known to sometimes get his messages across in an unconventional way. He arrived at Harvest service once dressed as a giant scarecrow, complete with straw hat. For another sermon, he dressed in full fisherman's garb. He always found new ways to reach people, delivering messages they could understand with humour and creativity.

At Rochdale, John played a very active role in the planning and building of the congregation's new building at Clover Street in 1974. It remains the congregation's home to this day. He was involved in ecumenical and interfaith activities in many of his communities, and kept close ties with clergy of other faiths and denominations. He promoted a broad and inclusive view of Unitarianism. On the national level, he served on various General Assembly committees, took part in the Unitarian Renewal Group, and, occasionally served as photographer at General Assembly Meetings. For all his many duties, John was known first and foremost as an extremely approachable person who always made time for others.

John pursued many enthusiasms in his life. He was an amateur tinkerer, always working on some gadget or other. He was an avid organ player, even adapting his own instruments, and a poet. He earned an O-Level in spinning and weaving when he was 40 years old, and kept a giant loom in a spare room. Whatever he did, he pursued it with gusto.

After a long battle with 'Mr Parkinson', as he referred to the disease, John Roberts died on 9 July at the age of 82. He leaves behind many, Unitarians and others, who remember his kindness and humour, diligent and tireless service on behalf of Unitarianism, and integrity to all.

*By the Rev Bob Janis-Dillon, minister with the Merseyside District Ministry Association.*

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# News in brief

By Dee Boyle

*'no one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark.  
You only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well'*

This is the opening four lines of the poem 'Home' by the Somali poet, Warsan Shire which was read by the Lord Mayor of York at an Interfaith service in the Unitarian Chapel, St Saviourgate to mark the end of Refugee Week 2016. Members of Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Ba'hai and Buddhist communities in York quoted from their scriptures the words which express the Golden Rule – 'Do as you would be done by' or as Confucius, the originator would have put it: 'What you do not want others to do to you, do not do to others'. The Sikh representative could not be present on the day and so their quotation was included in the main address given during the service.

The service had been suggested by Margot Brown one of the organisers of Refugee Action York (RAY) and she worked together with Unitarian minister Margaret Kirk on plans for it. During the service, representatives from RAY, York Racial Equality Network (YREN), Amnesty International and York City of Sanctuary (YCoS) spoke about the work they do in York with refugees and their hopes and plans for the future.

The powerful and moving poem by Warsan Shire encouraged those listening to remember the phrase 'Welcome home'. Welcome has been the theme of the 2016 Refugee Week and the event in York, on Saturday 25 June, was an installation and stall in Exhibition Square by Refugee Action York, Amnesty International, York and British Red Cross on the theme of welcome. The word 'Welcome' was written in shoes with a pathway of shoes walking towards it, symbolising the long journeys, often on foot, to reach somewhere safe which says 'welcome' made by so many refugees. In addition to these two events, the programme for Refugee Week was varied and stimulating ranging from music gigs, Festival of Ideas talks to films at the City Screen and a pub quiz. The Lord Mayor, Lady Mayoress and York Central MP, Rachel Maskell, attended several of the events during the week.

Earlier in the week, on 19 June, another service was held at St Saviourgate, led by Dee Boyle, a member of the



*The Lord Mayor of York and Lady Mayoress, together with Rev. Margaret Kirk who led the special Interfaith service at St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York on June 26th to mark the end of Refugee Week. With them in the photo are representatives of various faith groups from York and also several organisations supporting refugees, including Refugee Action York, York Racial Equality Network, Amnesty International and York City of Sanctuary.*

York Unitarian congregation, with the title 'What's in a Welcome'. This seemed especially poignant given what was happening in several countries where the refugees are currently arriving in their thousands to escape from the atrocities in their own homelands. They were not always being received with a warm welcome and somehow the words of the faiths of those countries were being forgotten. To show that refugees are being welcomed to York the congregation were reminded of a recent initiative coming out of activities at the York Unitarian Chapel and that was the idea of 'Welcome Bags'. Small items needed by newly arriving refugees are put into a gift bag and are given to those arriving in York. Essentials for people coming to the rather wet climate of England are; an umbrella, fold up shopping bags or back packs and of course a rain-mac which are all included in the bags!!

*Dee Boyle is a member of York Unitarians.*

## John Midgley celebrates 50 years

Padiham Unitarian Chapel played host to a unique celebration of Unitarian ministry on Sunday 10 July, when the Rev John Midgley led the morning service. *The occasion?* John was marking 50 years of his own ministry, which began at Padiham Chapel in July 1965.

In his sermon, John drew lessons from his early experiences at Padiham, and went on to highlight the continuing value of professional ministry to our Unitarian and Free Christian denomination. John's two years at Padiham were happy ones, and he went on to enjoy long and successful ministries at Altrincham (and Manchester Urmston), and then at Cross Street Chapel in central Manchester.

Although Revs John and Celia Midgley are both now retired, they retain pastoral oversight at Shelf Unitarian Chapel in West Yorkshire, and they remain active in the continuing life of the denomination. During their ministerial careers, both John and Celia served as Presidents of our General Assembly.

*– Jim Corrigan*



*After the service, Rev John Midgley gathered with Padiham stalwarts who were all his parishioners way back in 1965! They are (from left): Tony Cann, Joyce Thompson, David Atkinson and Barry Brown. Photo provided by Jim Corrigan*